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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0622 05/28/04

~ Find Gas Prices On Web ~ People Are Talking! ~ Waffles Get Kerry!
~ Spammer Gets Prison! ~ Web Suicide/Murder! ~ Yahoo Anti-Spyware!

~ Police Return to Class ~ Apple Patch Inadequate ~ NEC Cheated Schools!
~ PC Purchases Waning? ~ RIAA Lawsuits "Iffy"! ~ Spammers Snub FTC!

-* FBI Ready To Get Spammers! *-
-* Court Allows Lindows To Keep Name! *-
-* Art of Selling On eBay Takes Creativity! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it seemed appropriate this week that it would rain once I went back to work after a two-week vacation. That's the way it should be, if it's going to rain! A little chilly for this time of year, but I was pleased that the weather held out during my vacation.

It's been a rough week back, though. Two weeks of backlog to catch up on, as well as new projects starting up. Add to that the fact that our next year's budget planning deadline is rapidly approaching makes one yearn to be back in vacation mode very quickly! However, I really can't complain too much. It was great to get away from the daily headaches for awhile. You can't escape them, but it's certainly possible to put some distance between them for at least a short amount of time. Well, I survived the first week back, so that's a good thing!

And to make it even less painful is the fact that this weekend is a long holiday weekend for us here in the States. Unofficially, this Memorial Day weekend is the start of summer. I'm looking forward to it! Remember to celebrate responsibly!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, another week has come and gone and it's time to take a look at what's been going on in the NewsGroups. To be quite honest, the messages are getting more and more sparse, and a lot of them are what I'd hoped we'd never see in our little corner of cyberspace.

More and more often, people have been lashing out at one another. The kind of flame-posts that've been thrown back and forth are the kind that I've seen WinDOZE users bandying about. For a long time, we Atari users

refrained from dirtying up the NewsGroups with that kind of thing....

We used to reserve that for GEnie. <grin>

Anyway, I think it's a sign of the times. Good manners no longer seem to count for anything, so you'd might as well be rude and downright nasty to get your point across.

Well I'm sorry, but that kind of thing doesn't do anything for me. I guess that I still see the UseNet as a community while others have grown to see it only as a means to an end. In a community, you have to get along because these peoples' opinions matter to you. It really disappoints me to see it happening to our community, probably because we're a small community and getting smaller all the time.

But that's not what I came to tell ya about. <grin>

I'm just going to mention registering to vote again and then we'll get to the NewsGroup stuff.

I've gotten a couple more emails about 'the voting thing' that I'd like to mention. A few people are still clinging to the idea that I should come right out and tell you who I support in the upcoming election. My question is, "Why"?

I really don't care who you vote for as long as you vote. Elections are like busses... sooner or later, another one will come along. I'm a bit jaded myself, but I think that the process itself is more important than any individual outcome.

Our founding fathers must have been of the same opinion, since they designed things so that no matter how big a mistake we might make, we could always fix it the next time around.

Some might see this as a reason to refrain from voting, but the truth is that the system is only going to go on working if we participate. Otherwise, leaders could be selected by public opinion polls and demographics. But polling and demographic research aren't voting. When it comes right down to it, voting is 'the moment of truth'. So if you're not registered to vote yet, get thee to ye ole town hall and register. And when November rolls around, get out and vote.

Yes, you can 'get active' and volunteer your time to a particular party or candidate, but that's still not as important as the simple act of voting. Voting is a right, but it's also a responsibility. People in other countries are proud to walk for hours or days across wasteland in order to participate in elections. I don't know of any place in this country where transit is that difficult, and yet voter turnout gets lower and lower as we go along. If you're like me, bucking a trend makes things all the more worthwhile. So buck the trend and get your butt out there and vote! <grin>

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Mark-Tim Junghanns asks about a favorite game from days-gone-by:

"Back in 1986, I owned my first Atari 520ST+ with TOS 1.0 . There was this great game called "Bounce". Does anyone remember? Was this game freeware? If so, where can it be found for download? If no, hmm, too bad..."

Brian Roland tells Mark-Tim:

"I'm not sure about your game.

If you're accessing the newsgroups from a windows PC I suggest you install steem and browse the links in its info menu. It has tons of ST specific game sites, often with disk images where you can actually grab the games. I say install and see, because there's just so many links it would take me an hour to pull the urls and post them here.

steem can be found at:
http://steem.atari.st

That web site might even provide a lot of those links without installing STeem. Have a look-see."

Michel Jubault asks for help with one of the less familiar ST models:

"I explain my the problem to you: Wanting to start again my 260 ST, I had the unpleasant one surprised to have a screen with multicoloured vertical lines then a whole of multicoloured points!

With each time I starts again it I have same Pb exactly! I dismounted the monster : a rapid overflight shows me that a condenser isn't well at one end the face is completely black with a hole! (470 mF, 16v)

I put links to you towards the photographs of what I have (it is easier to have an idea)!

Two screens:
http://lacantina.dyndns.org/sasfepu/images/260st/260st_ecran1.jpg
http://lacantina.dyndns.org/sasfepu/images/260st/260st_ecran2.jpg

The condenser:
http://lacantina.dyndns.org/sasfepu/images/260st/260st_in.jpg

It would be great someone could say to me if it is repairable or if it definitively died!"

Stephen Moss tells Michel:

"Most Electrolytic capacitors (condensers) have one metal (negative) end which is part of the can and a black plastic (positive) end cap that is held in place due to the the top end of the can being folded over it. Usually when a capacitor like this blows the end cap blows off and a cotton wool type substance is ejected usually accompanied by some silver foil.
Unfortunately I am unable to view the image of it at this time but it does not sound like this has happened, however they can become short circuit as well which could cause problems. The way to check this is to remove one end of the capacitor from the circuit and measure its

resistance, if it is not short circuit the reading will increase (if you have your meter probes connected the right way round) and should decrease when you reverse the probe connections.

I'm not expert but it sounds like it could be a problem with the video shifter, make sure it is in its socket correctly and check any electrolytic capacitors that my be close to it.

General Note:
The electrolyte in electrolytic capacitors will dry out resulting in the capacitors going short circuit if the equipment is not used for a long time. If you have equipment that has not been used for a long time (5 years +) the best thing to do is to connect it via a various set to provide 50V AC output and leave it on for a day so that the electrolytics get trickle charged which can reform the electrolyte as opposed to turning them at full load.

I appreciate that not everyone has this facility therefore you should disconnect the output from the main power supply (which has the most susceptible capacitors) from the circuit board and leave it on for a day. I recommend keeping an eye on it in case something start to burn so you could do just an hour or two over several days."

Marius Diepenhorst adds:

"I have not much experience with the technical part of atari ST machines. But I have lots of experience with the repair and maintenance of atari 8bit computers. It looks like your atari does not reach the OS. The colour bars are the first thing the atari shows in less then a second before the screen turns white and then a disk-boot and desktop comes up.

In your case the white screen does not come ... so there must be a halt somewhere. I think it is the OS_ROM (does an atari 260 st have OS in rom btw.?) or in other case I think it is a fault in your ram-section.

By the way the capacitor in the corner is a piece that takes care of in-disturbance, so I guess even if it is defect, the problem is not what you have now.."

Jo Even Skarstein adds a bit of experience:

"If the ST hasn't been used for a while, you might want to remove and reinstall the socketed chips before you do any more repairs. The symptoms you describe might indicate some bad connections to the shifter or GLUE-chip."

Nick Harlow muses about one of the bright sides of using an Atari computer:

"One advantage of Atari Computers is that I don't have to be so bloody careful with virus....

ie in last 24 hours I have received over 11000 w/32-sober-G infected spoofed emails... bloody annoying

and what is even more annoying is that the poor sod who is sending them has a broadband connection and doesn't know he's or she is infected... I know they have a broadband or always on connection because of the spread of

sending against the amount sent.

Thats what comes of having a free to use email address.. something for scanners to pick up...

But if you have PC’s or Macs you do regularly update your virus checking don’t you folks..??

By the way don’t forget JagFest’UK http://www.uk.jagfest.org.uk/

and I will see some of you in France this weekend...enjoy the holiday guys and gals...."

Steve Sweet tells Nick:

"But still have to be careful. Wait till they get short of windows exploits then they’ll turn their attention back on minority users.

I had a bit of a session like that in the new year, my mailbox filled and was emptied about 15 times with only 3 useful emails remaining, the rest being virii of various description. A good Antivirus stopped them all at the door until i decided to kill them on the server. Kept me busy for almost all weekend.

In your case a non-spoofed email address is included with this post for yet another scanner to glean.

’Adam’ asks about where he might find a graphics accelerator for his Falcon:

"Can anyone tell me were I can buy some kind of graphics accel. for Falcon? I’d like to have (as a minimum) 800x600 resolution (or better 1024x768) with 256 colors... and reasonable refresh rate.
Which one is the best - any quick comparison (including where to buy and approx. price...)???"

Sam F. tells Adam:

"Wait for the new graphics card being developed. It’s the SuperVidel, read about here: http://www.dtek.chalmers.se/~d98gilda/"

Adam Klobukowski adds:

"800x600 with 256c if possible on plain stock Falcon - try Videlity, Videl Inside, Blowup or any other program like this."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Enjoy the Memorial Day holiday, but please, please, please don’t drink and drive. The life you save may be MINE! Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Everything Old Is New Again!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Killzone' Out This Fall!
Microsoft Xbox/PC Hybrid?!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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In Video Games, Everything Old Is New Again

Hold on to something long enough, the theory goes - a car, a tie or even a hairstyle - and eventually it will be cool again.

And so it goes with video games, where today's fans can't get enough of games that were popular when their parents were kids, and quarter-a-game arcade machines now sell for thousands of dollars each.

In a nod to the nostalgia boom for classic video games, the Electronic Entertainment Expo - E3 - the industry's major trade show, a forum devoted to hyping the latest in game technology, last week also organized a tribute to old-school pixilated fun.

Featuring classic arcade cabinets like "Ms. Pac-Man," "Popeye," "Donkey Kong," "Punch-Out" and "Space Age," and well-loved home consoles like the Nintendo Entertainment System, Sega Genesis and 3DO, this year's expo drew fans nostalgic for the days when playing a game meant little more than mashing one or two buttons over and over again.

"These games are designed to be addictive," said Keith Robinson, president of Intellivision Productions, lamenting the fact that modern games are designed more for sneaking around dark corners and exploring vast mostly fictitious lands than the simple fun of trying to rack up high scores.

Robinson, one of the original programers for the 1980s' Intellivision game system, is one of the "Blue Sky Rangers," a tight-knit group of former Intellivision programers who continue to work together on various projects.

In fact, even as the modern games industry gets bigger and bigger, classic gaming is very much in vogue.

Collections of throwback arcade games are available for consoles, handhelds, personal digital assistants and cell phones, and Microsoft Corp. has announced it will launch an arcade featuring some classics such as the race favorite "Pole Position" on its Xbox Live online gaming service later

this year.

One of the organizers of the Los Angeles Classic Gaming Expo, Joe Santulli, said the adults who own and play today’s games grew up playing the kinds of games he has on display.

"There’s the memories," he said. "Naturally, a childhood should bring happy thoughts of a simpler time."

And while new versions of old games are popular sellers, the originals are worth more money than some ever imagined.

At the E3 event, the organizers offered a flyer from a southern California shop selling pinball machines, redemption games and arcade cabinets from about $400 to nearly $7,000.

On eBay, a brisk business in old consoles has some systems, bundled with games and accessories, selling for well over $300, some of them even in various stages of disrepair.

Commercially, games have come a long way from the early 1980s, when game developers, like early underground hip-hop DJs, resorted to selling their wares out of the trunks of their cars, often packaged in plastic baggies.

"We didn’t have advertising - you found these things in a Laundromat," said George Sanger, a legend in video game history for his work on game audio whose nickname "Fat Man" belies his slight frame.

"We started in Mom’s basement," Sanger said. "We had nothing to work with but two bits and a six-pack of Jolt."

But he said some of the creativity has been lost in modern games, vast and expensive undertakings that involve dozens of people that can make or break entire companies.

"It’s impossible to do art under those conditions," Sanger said.

Though the Atari system and others like it are long gone, the names remain, and the head of the company that now carries the Atari name said the old games are an irresistible draw for some people, much like the child’s sled that is the object of a media mogul’s yearning in the film classic "Citizen Kane."

"It’s like ’Rosebud,"’ Bruno Bonnell, Atari’s chief executive, said.

Microsoft Considering Xbox/PC Hybrid

Information on Xbox 2 has been hard to come by, but recent focus groups suggest that Microsoft may be envisioning plans above and beyond their next console, according to a CNN Money article. The company has recently been studying the potential appeal of a hybrid machine with the potential to play Xbox, Xbox 2, and PC titles.

Both Microsoft and its Xbox division are clients of California-based market research company The B/R/S Group, which has been collecting feedback from consumers regarding a product called "Xbox Next PC." The machine was described as "a videogame console system with a hard drive and a built-in

fully functional PC" to focus groups, adding that the unit would require a PC monitor (or HDTV) and would be fully backwards compatible with current Xbox software as well as Xbox 2 games yet to come.

What's more, the "Xbox Next PC" would include a fully functional release of Windows, a CD burner, DVD player with remote control, built-in access to the company's Xbox Live service, and a hard drive. Concerning peripherals, Microsoft would potentially package the system with a keyboard, mouse, and a standard Xbox controller. The final price tag was estimated to be about $599.

"We would be remiss if we didn't look at consumer scenarios that take advantage of our strengths," said Peter Moore, corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing for Microsoft's home and entertainment division. "[But] this is one amongst many, many other consumer scenarios that we're looking at."

Microsoft's research on a potential market for the hypothetical machine is in no way a confirmation of such a machine's development, but it is certainly a point of interest and a way for the company to shape its efforts accordingly. The "Xbox Next PC" would allow for cross-platform integration to a degree that current consoles don't offer, but it remains to be determined whether or not these are worth pursuing.

"If you put two and two together, there's no doubt there's a great opportunity to put the two platforms together," said Moore. "Obviously with a company like Microsoft this is something we have to look into and ask about. Is it actionable today? Probably not, but it's something we need to look at."

Killzone Out This Fall

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced the fall 2004 release of Killzone, available exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system. Developed by Guerrilla, in conjunction with Sony Computer Entertainment Europe and Sony Computer Entertainment America's Santa Monica Studios, Killzone is a squad-based, first-person shooter, set in the near future during a period of planetary colonization. Drawing inspiration from classical military conflicts of the 20th century, Killzone demonstrates a unique graphical style that captures the grit and realism of intense military warfare. Featuring online gameplay via the Network Adaptor (Ethernet/modem) (for PlayStation 2) with voice-chat capabilities via the USB Headset (for PlayStation 2), Killzone is based on classic military altercations found in the history of warfare; players will battle through trenches, endure city sieges, sweat through jungles and battle guerilla combatants.

"Killzone will make fans of first-person shooters look at the genre in an entirely different way," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "Killzone is a game that delivers unique off- and online gameplay through an engrossing storyline, unbelievable graphics, great characters and an awesome array of weapons. As in every epic war story, Killzone also delivers a bad guy that everyone is going to love to hate: the Helghast."

The storyline behind Killzone occurs sometime in the near future on the nearby colony of Vecta, one of the interplanetary colonies that humans have

established outside of Earth. An invading militaristic separatist faction called the Helghast has set out to decimate the ISA forces and colonize the planet. The only thing standing between the colony's survival and complete destruction is an elite squad of human ISA forces. Players can select between four ISA troops - each with special abilities and weaponry to accommodate their playing style - and battle through 11 intricately detailed environments that showcase the harsh setting of a war-ridden planet. Additionally, players can visit the armory and equip themselves with 27 different unique weapons. In particular, there are 21 first-person weapons that the player can carry, five emplaced weapons, and hand grenades.

Killzone employs a highly advanced artificial intelligence technology that allows Helghast enemies to calculate threats, maintain squad directives and adhere to self-preservation tactics to determine a unique course of action. Killzone also features an original score performed by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has not yet rated Killzone.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Just in time for the long holiday weekend travelers...

Eagle-eyed Spotters Post Prices Online

Remember Paul Revere, who rode door to door tipping off colonists to the approaching British troops?

Meet his spiritual descendents, the fuel-obsessed Gas Spotters.

Not a catchy name, granted, but they're a fired-up bunch who have hitched indignation over high gasoline prices to the power of the Internet in order to alert Americans to the best deals in (your town here).

The fruits of their labors, as well as a shortcut to a few dollars off your next fill-up, are found on two Web sites - gasbuddy.com and gaspricewatch.com - whose popularity is skyrocketing along with prices.

The concept is simple: Drivers register at the sites and log in gas prices from around their neighborhoods. With more than 100,000 volunteer gas spotters each, both sites manage to provide good coast-to-coast coverage.

"I guess we all share a passion for not wanting to get ripped off," says gas spotter John Chauvin of Dixmont, Maine, whose wife and four daughters - who live in Florida and Connecticut - all report in for gasbuddy.com.

"It's a great thing to know that if you get off at Exit 44 near me, you've

got a choice between $2.18 and $1.99," Chauvin says. "It’s not much in a car, but if you’re filling a 150-gallon RV, you’ll be plenty happy."

Gasbuddy.com kicked off in 2000, when co-founder Jason Toews, a Minneapolis computer programmer, became fed up with seeing 10-cent differences at stations around his home.

"It seemed like a logical way to use the Web," Toews says.

Others agree: Since January, site visits have shot up to 300,000 a day from 30,000. Even more impressive, traffic at gaspricewatch.com, which also launched in 2000, has tripled since February to 2 million hits a day.

"Most people love this, but we’ve also gotten some strange hate mail from folks who are convinced we’re involved in price fixing," says gaspricewatch.com founder Brad Proctor of Dayton, Ohio. "People get passionate about this stuff, on both sides."

Proctor says his site is self-policing when it comes to bogus gas info; once a member has been caught inventing a price, they’re banned from the site. Gasbuddy.com’s Toews says most folks are pretty earnest in their desire to help like-minded motorists.

"I use the site to save a few dollars, which is important to me, so I figure if someone’s taken the time, at least I can do likewise," says Joe Morris, a gas spotter from Lake Los Angeles, Calif., a one-stoplight, two gas station hamlet that is 20 minutes from the nearest shopping excursion.

Morris, a substitute teacher, has been dutifully tracking prices at stations around this rural empire northeast of Los Angeles since 2001. He used to jot prices and station addresses in a notepad. But a near accident while writing persuaded him to memorize details until he can pull over.

Most of us are far more aware of gas price differences around our neighborhoods these days. But it’s good to know that when we’re not paying attention, Morris and his fellow gas spotters are in the saddle.

"I do it every day," Morris says. "Weekends, too."

FBI Ready To Get Spammers

Although no spammer has been criminally charged under the CAN-SPAM Act since it went into effect nearly six months ago, on Thursday the Federal Bureau of Investigation said it had scores in its sights.

In testimony before Congress, Jana Monroe, the assistant director of the FBI’s cyber division, said that the law enforcement agency has identified over 100 significant spammers, and has targeted half of them for possible prosecution.

Monroe didn’t go into specifics, saying only that an investigative "initiative is being projected for later this year in which it is anticipated that criminal and civil actions under the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 will be included."

She was one of several witnesses who spoke before the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee, which held a hearing Thursday to

examine how CAN-SPAM has worked since it took effect Jan. 1, 2004.

"These cases may be investigated and prosecuted as computer intrusion matters, or as on-line cyber frauds which may lend themselves to a variety of existing state and/or federal statutes, including the recently passed CAN-SPAM Act," said Monroe.

The CAN-SPAM Act lays out requirements for mass-mailers - including the inclusion of opt-out links and postal addresses - and bans the use of "zombies," hijacked computers that are used as spamming centers. Its penalties include both fines and jail time of up to five years.

Spammer Sentenced to 7 Years in Prison

A man who sent 850 million junk e-mails through accounts he opened with stolen identities was sentenced to up to seven years in prison on Thursday.

Atlanta-based Internet service provider Earthlink Inc. said it hoped the sentence and an earlier $16.4 million civil judgment against Howard Carmack will deter other spammers.

"Before spammers send one more spam e-mail, we think they should remember that what happened to Howard Carmack can happen to them," said Karen Casion, Earthlink’s assistant general counsel.

Jurors sentenced Carmack to seven years for convictions in March of forgery, identity theft and falsifying business records. He must serve a minimum 3 1/2 years.

Earthlink said Carmack ran 343 illegal e-mail accounts under false names from 2002 until his arrest last May, using them to send unsolicited e-mail ads for things like get-rich-quick schemes and sexual enhancers.

Carmack told the judge he believed the case against him was overblown, saying there were no victims. "I obviously regret this whole involvement," he said.

Carmack was convicted of defrauding EarthLink and eight men from New York, Ohio and Washington, D.C. Last May, the company won a $16.4 million civil judgment against Carmack.

Porn Spammers Thumb Noses At FTC, CAN-SPAM

Spammers pitching pornography are largely ignoring the Federal Trade Commission’s recent requirements, message-filtering firms said Thursday.

Fewer than one in six pornographic unsolicited e-mails scanned by MX Logic complied with CAN-SPAM’s new rules, said Scott Chasin, the Denver-based company’s chief technology officer.

As part of the implementation of the CAN-SPAM Act, which went into effect Jan. 1, the FTC ruled last week that all pornographic e-mail must carry the label "SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT" in the subject head. The notice is intended to warn recipients that a message contains sexually-oriented material, as

well as to make it easier for users, businesses, and Internet providers to block such messages.

"We're not seeing a huge compliance with the new rulings," said Chasin, whose company scanned a sampling of 12,000 pornographic messages during the seven days since the FTC began requiring the label. Only 15.3 percent of the porn spam was properly labeled.

The result isn't surprising, said Chasin, since the porn industry makes even more use of underground spamming techniques - including proxies and zombies, hijacked computers that spew spam unbeknownst to their owners - than the spam business overall.

"Porn spam is usually the dirtiest, no pun intended, from the distribution method perspective," said Chasin.

What did make Chasin pause was that early compliance by the porn industry was significantly higher than general compliance with the CAN-SPAM Act.

"What really was surprising was that we're seeing less compliance with CAN-SPAM than with porn's new labeling."

In fact, compliance with CAN-SPAM slipped last month for the first time since the act was made law at the beginning of 2004. After a slow ramp-up, compliance with the anti-spam regulation plateaued around three percent, said Chasin, but in April, it dipped to an even more disappointing one percent.

"There's a decline in compliance across the board," he said, and added that it was "stating the obvious" to call CAN-SPAM a failure in its effort to stem spam. "Most consumers can recognize that just by looking in their inboxes."

Although it's difficult to tell why porn spammers are following the rules 15 times more often than other spammers, Chasin put forward several theories, ranging from the more specific FTC requirements for pornographic e-mails to the porn industry's habit of trying to follow the law knowing that if they don't, the hammer will fall.

Other messaging filtering firms have also done preliminary research into porn spam compliance with CAN-SPAM, but have come up with different results.

Brightmail, an acquisition target of security firm Symantec, reported that its analysis of mail during a 40-hour post-FTC ruling period showed about 40 percent of pornographic e-mail used the SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT label, or a variation of it. (MX Logic only counted those messages that used the exact label required by the FTC.)

However, Brightmail pooh-poohed the idea that porn spammers were making a sincere effort to comply. "This is an attempt by spammers to make their messages look as though they are in compliance with the law, when in most cases they are not," a Brightmail spokesperson said in an e-mail.

Whether more porn spammers, or spammers in general, will follow the letter of the law is unclear, added MX Logic's Chasin, and will likely depend on how aggressively the government continues its crackdown on spammers.

Last week, the FBI claimed it had identified over 100 significant spammers, and would target half of them for possible prosecution after investigations

conclude.

"We've already seen some of the first prosecutions under CAN-SPAM, but I don't see any real deterrence aftershock," said Chasin.

"Maybe if the FBI leads a more aggressive investigation and prosecution, we might see some additional deterrence, but that's not likely until later in the year."

Apple Patch 'Inadequate'

Apple issued a patch on Friday in response to the discovery of two OS X holes that allow malicious code to travel from Internet sites to users' computers. Apple's announcement of the patch included a statement that the vulnerabilities created by the holes are "theoretical," and that users that regularly download patches to their operating systems receive such fixes routinely.

This specific patch, however, leaves users "just as vulnerable as they were before," Niels Henrik Rasmussen, CEO of computer security firm Secunia, told NewsFactor.

The two flaws allow malicious code to be transmitted through Internet browsers - such as Internet Explorer - on which users have left the default settings in place. Even after downloading the patch, though, "it is still possible to execute arbitrary code on a vulnerable user's system," said Rasmussen.

The first flaw exploits a vulnerability in the OSX "help" URI handler, and the patch addresses that. However, by downplaying the critical nature of the flaw, Apple is failing to convey to users the importance of downloading the patch, according to Rasmussen.

Apple has yet to learn the lessons of operating-system competitor Microsoft, which routinely describes the nature and impact of most vulnerabilities, allowing customers to determine whether to fix a problem. Network administrators routinely use the rating system to create a schedule for implementing fixes or to group them into workable categories.

In addition, Rasmussen says, Apple did not address the second vulnerability - "disk" URI - at all. This hole allows malicious code to be placed on a PC without the user's knowledge.

Secunia has recommended a series of manual steps that users can follow to eliminate the holes. By unchecking the "Open 'safe' files after downloading" item in Internet preferences and adding a protocol helper (application) for the "disk" and "disks" items, says a Secunia advisory, users can protect their systems.

Police Go Back to Class to Catch Internet Crooks

Police are heading back to the classroom as a new breed of criminals turns to the Internet to prey on unsuspecting victims. Across Europe and beyond, cyber investigators are being trained in computer forensics - a

crime-fighting technique that is part science, part sleuthing.

Investigators comb through seized computer hard drives, looking amid countless disguised files for evidence the machine was used in a crime.

The clues could be elaborate computer programs designed to hijack a victim’s PC, or e-mail and Web browsing logs revealing the identity of conspirators.

"It’s akin to auto mechanics," said Dan Haagman, head of training for 7Safe Ltd, a Cambridge-based firm that instructs police and civilians in computer forensics.

"You rule out things early on. You search for signs that give you a picture of a particular security breach," he added.

The same techniques can be used to trace or at least build a profile of a criminal suspect from a hacked PC or computer network, he said.

As criminals turn to high-tech gadgets and the Internet to commit crimes ranging from extortion to drug dealing, computer forensics is rapidly becoming as crucial to an investigation as DNA evidence, police say.

"I expect new staff to have an absolute minimum of computer and software forensics before they even walk in the door," said Marc Kirby, detective inspector for the computer forensics section at Britain’s National Hi-Tech Crime Unit.

In addition to training local police in cyber-sleuthing techniques, Kirby’s 55 investigators also hunt criminals.

Earlier this month, the NHTCU arrested 12 people in a case in which a Russian crime gang is accused of using an e-mail scam known as "phishing" to defraud UK bank customers out of hundreds of thousands of pounds.

In another success, a string of globe-spanning pedophilia stings has determined the identities of thousands of suspects who use the Internet to trade and collect pornographic images.

But police forces around the world remain a step behind.

In the UK, home to some of Europe’s most advanced cybercrime fighting forces, just 1,000 of the country’s 140,000 police officers are trained to handle digital evidence. Fewer than 250 have high-level computer forensics skills, says European information security lobby group EURIM.

Efforts have been ramped up across Europe to close the gap.

Earlier this month, British police toiled in the reflection of their computer screens. They were hunting the deep recesses of a computer for traces of an increasingly popular cybercrime weapon known as "malware" in a 7Safe training session.

Malware is malicious computer code programmed by an underworld of hackers, virus writers and sometimes spammers to commit all manners of crime.

In the training exercise, investigators discovered in a deep corner of the hard drive a nasty piece of malware known as a "Trojan" installed on the machine without the user’s knowledge.

Criminals use "Trojans" and "backdoors" to infect PCs. An army of vulnerable machines can then be programmed to execute a digital denial-of-service attack on a Web retailer or flood the Internet with dubious e-mail messages aiming to defraud users out of their bank details in a typical phishing expedition.

The prospect of stopping zombie PC attacks from every corner of the globe is a new criminal threat.

As always, the only way for an investigator to catch a cyber criminal is to learn their tricks. "To truly understand malware they have to use it. To understand hacking they have to do it," Haagman said.

Yahoo Adds Anti-Spyware Feature to Browser Toolbar

Internet media company Yahoo Inc. unveiled a feature on Wednesday for its Web browser toolbar aimed at making it easier for users to remove unwanted "spyware" programs that snoop on Web surfing habits and other activities.

Yahoo’s move comes amid increasing competition for Web surfers against rivals Google Inc. and Microsoft Corp., which also offer popular browser toolbars, in the market for search and information services, along with related advertising.

Anti-Spy for the Yahoo! Toolbar, which is being released as a beta, or test, version, allows users to identify potentially unwanted software that creeps into personal computers.

Spyware often monitors Web surfing habits and can also cause issues such as displaying advertising and redirecting users to a particular home page. Some spyware can creep onto PCs without a user’s knowledge and others come attached to other programs.

Julie Herendeen, vice president of Yahoo’s networking products, said that the anti-spyware features is the first offered by a major Web portal to a broad Internet audience for free.

"Spyware is a serious issue, Herendeen said, but did not give a date when the full release version of the toolbar with anti-spyware would be released.

After scanning a PC, a user has the option to disable, remove or keep spyware. Yahoo said its anti-spyware technology is based on Pest Patrol’s software.

Yahoo’s toolbar also features other tools such as a search window, a pop-up advertising blocker, bookmarks and other customizable features.

NEC Pleas Guilty to Cheating Schools

NEC-Business Network Solutions, a unit of NEC America, will plead guilty to defrauding a U.S. government program to help needy schools use the Internet.

Under a plea agreement, the company will pay $20.6 million in fines, civil settlements, and restitution, the Department of Justice has announced. Judge Charles Breyer of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California is scheduled to hear the guilty plea and rule on the plea agreement Thursday afternoon, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew Jacobs.

NEC/BNS was charged with collusion and wire fraud in the U.S. Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate program, which uses money from telecommunications user fees to fund Internet use by schools. Under the program, schools apply for funds to cover cabling, Internet equipment, and monthly connectivity fees.

The company is charged with allocating contracts and rigging bids in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act at school districts in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arkansas, and South Carolina, according to the DOJ.

It also has been charged with wire fraud in connection with a scheme to defraud E-Rate and the San Francisco Unified School District. In the San Francisco case, NEC/BNS inflated bids, agreed to submit false and fraudulent documents to hide plans to install ineligible items, and agreed to donate "free" items for which it planned to bill E-Rate, according to the DOJ's statement. The company also filed false and fraudulent documents to cut off inquiry into the legitimacy of the funding request, the DOJ said. Under the plea agreement, NEC/BNS would pay a $4.7 million fine for those crimes.

The company also entered into a civil settlement on Thursday to provide restitution for the harm caused by its crimes. It will pay $10.3 million in cash and provide $5.6 million in goods and services to designated school districts as a condition of a three-year probation, the DOJ said.

NEC/BNS is cooperating in an ongoing government investigation, according to the statement.

"When we realized we had an issue here, we cooperated with them, we investigated ourselves, and we have taken all the appropriate actions to make sure this can't happen again," said Tom Burger, president and chief executive officer of NEC Unified Solutions and NEC/BNS.

RIAA Lawsuit Strategy Iffy at Best

Close to 3,000 music downloaders have been sued - the latest actions filed in court Monday - at an ROI that could be in the negative strike zone for the RIAA. Reportedly, some 486 cases have been settled at an average of US$3,000 per case.

Of course, the lawsuits the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) has been filing against users of P2P music Web sites never were about getting money from them.

That being the case, what could the RIAA be thinking as it pushes these suits forward? Studies show they have not made an appreciable dent in music-piracy rates. Worse, the early tales of grandparents and young children being hauled into court riled legitimate consumers. One has to wonder what the RIAA's end goal is, exactly.

The last question is easy enough to answer, Gartner media research director

Mike McGuire tells NewsFactor. "I would not presume to speak for the agency, but it is fairly clear their intent is to drive down the level of online music piracy to a manageable level."

Fair enough, given the RIAA's constituency, which is record labels, and its mission to protect the rights of copyright holders.

"I think they are realistic to know they can't totally eliminate piracy," McGuire says, "but they are trying to get it down to manageable level.

Another added plus, from the viewpoint of the RIAA, is that the suits have raised awareness of the issue of piracy. When Napster first burst onto the scene, very few people realized it was illegal to download music. Indeed, the record industry had to establish that in court. Napster was shut down as a result and eventually resurrected as a subscription service.

Today, most people are aware that downloading free music is illegal - although whether that stops the majority of the users of file-sharing Web sites is debatable. Certainly, some people have been frightened enough to stay away from the Kazaas of the Internet. Others, though, have been spurred to go further underground, using sites that disguise a user's identity.

In short, the lawsuits are simply a stop-gap measure. Still, "whether or not you or I think they are effective, I am sure the RIAA will continue with them," says McGuire.

Court Allows Lindows to Keep Its Name

In a case that could have forced Linux vendor Lindows to change its business name worldwide, a Netherlands court ruled this week that Lindows' current limited use of the Lindows name does not violate Microsoft's Windows trademark.

After it lost an earlier case in the same Amsterdam court over the use of the Lindows name, Lindows changed the name of its operating system product and corresponding Web site to Linspire. However, it kept Lindows as its company name.

Microsoft sued Lindows again, charging that use of Lindows as its company name also constitutes an infringement on its Windows trademark. The Amsterdam District Court disagrees.

"Not every use of the business name Lindows infringes on the Windows trademark," Judge Sj. A. Rullmann says in her ruling.

Lindows currently uses the Lindows name only in the small print on its Web site and product documentation and clearly states that it is not affiliated with Microsoft. That use is not in violation of the court's January ruling that barred Lindows from using the name to sell its version of the Linux operating system, according to the court.

Microsoft has aggressively been fighting Lindows over the similarity between the Windows and Lindows names. The Redmond, Washington, software vendor has had success in bringing actions against Lindows in the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden.

Microsoft has had less success in the U.S., where it lost two requests for an injunction. Furthermore, last week a federal appeals court declined Microsoft's request to review a key pretrial ruling against the company.

As a result, a jury reviewing the U.S. case would be instructed to consider whether "windows" was a generic term before Microsoft introduced software with that name in 1985.

Art of eBay Selling - Clear, Precise, Entertaining

Selling on eBay (http://www.ebay.com) may be as basic as taking out a classified ad, but a little creativity can go a long way.

Take Larry Star, whose hilarious listing was headlined: "One slightly used size 12 wedding gown. Only worn twice: once at the wedding and once for these pictures."

The model was the bearded and tattooed software test designer himself, with his face deleted "to protect me from my bar buddies and co-workers finding out about it."

The aspiring comedy writer's listing, laced with resentment about his ex-wife, drew more than 11 million hits and a $3,850 winning bid in April for the "$1,200 shower curtain."

The bid turned out to be a prank, but Star got the notoriety that he really wanted. Thanks to the listing, he has twice appeared on both MSNBC's "Countdown" and NBC's "Today Show," made his stand-up comedy debut at the Punchline Comedy Club in Atlanta, and now has his own Web site (http://www.weddingdressguy.com).

Star was not available for an interview, but has admitted in news reports to taking creative liberties about his life to make the sale.

"People might get a little creative occasionally, but (Star) didn't make up a story about the merchandise," said Marsha Collier, whose book, "eBay for Dummies" (Wiley), is now in its fourth edition (http://www.dummies.com).

The most successful eBay sellers list items clearly and accurately, with photographs.

At least 430,000 individuals make a living buying and selling on the site, eBay Chief Executive Meg Whitman said recently.

"A person could quit a job to do this," said Ken Tate, 81, who has listed 200 items at a time on eBay. In a business that relies on feedback ratings, Tate has positive comments from 99.9 percent of his buyers, helped by his guarantee on all products and bonus items that he throws in to surprise them.

"You have to be totally honest," said Sherry Landow, a mother of four who has sold two cars on eBay. "With a major purchase, I couldn't not give them an entire description."

Last July, her 2001 model Ford Expedition, in excellent condition, sold for $19,750 on eBay, based solely on her listing with photos, and an independent inspection.

"A dealer would have given me $15,500," said Landow, who started selling on eBay to clean out her house. "If I'd put an ad in the newspaper, I would have got more than that, but certainly not more than what I got."

Specific descriptions help. For instance, a "Louis Vuitton" bag may attract all sorts of buyers, but bids are likely to be higher for a "Louis Vuitton multicolore pochette" - which describes the item's pattern and style.

AuctionDrop (http://www.auctiondrop.com), whose stores sell on eBay on behalf of customers for a fee, has specialists in different fields who know what to emphasize in a listing.

"When somebody brings in a bag, we can identify it correctly and list it properly so that true LV fanatics can find them because we've put in the appropriate keywords," said Drue Miller, director of research.

A listing in the right category also boosts sales. The sales rate for Palm pilots listed as "handheld units" under "PDAs/handheld PCs" in the "consumer electronics" category is about 69 percent, but less under other slightly different headings, noted Jack Reynolds, founder of QuikDrop, another eBay consignment store franchise (http://www.quikdrop.com).

Stores like AuctionDrop and QuikDrop charge 20 percent to 40 percent of the sale price for taking on the hassle of listing the item on eBay. More than 90 percent of eBay's 41.2 million active users are buyers only, with many put off by the thought of taking digital photographs, writing descriptions, handling feedback and shipping items to buyers.

Many Powersellers - who move more than $1,000 of merchandise on eBay each month - also sell on behalf of others under eBay's Trading Assistant program, and advertise their services on the auction site itself.

But the author of "eBay for Dummies" balks at the idea of paying someone to do something so simple. "Nobody holds a big secret to eBay," Collier said. "It's not difficult."

An eBay seller, as a business, can even order free U.S. Post Office shipping supplies online (http://supplies.usps.gov), she pointed out.

Collier, who put her daughter through college by selling on eBay, said the site can be a source of inexpensive merchandise that can be resold at a much higher price.

Would-be eBay entrepreneurs should focus on their areas of expertise as well as seek out poorly listed items, with misspellings or vague descriptions, she advised.

A search under "lot of" or "pallet of" will turn up wholesale bargains or imperfect items that, with an effective relisting and a little tender loving care, can sell for a small fortune.

Will Users Pass on PC Purchases?

Obsolete operating systems are pushing the PC industry into its biggest upgrade cycle since the Y2K bonanza, but in the longer term the industry's model for continued growth is itself just about obsolete, according to

analysts.

Worldwide, PC makers will ship 186.4 million units this year, up 13.6 percent from last year, according to the latest projections from Gartner. Out of those shipments more than half - nearly 100 million - will be replacements, and next year the replacement shipments will hit 120 million, Gartner says. Replacement shipments this year and next year will surpass the record replacement numbers seen in 1998 and 1999, as companies rushed to dump systems that might be vulnerable to the Millennium Bug, Gartner said.

The optimistic figures are based on shipments so far this year, according to the research firm. George Shiffler, principal analyst for Gartner's client platforms research, says a major factor in driving replacements isn't the need for better performance or a desire for new features, but the expiration of Microsoft technical support for older operating systems.

"More than 30 percent of installed PCs are now at least three years old," Shiffler says. "Many, if not most of these PCs, are using older Windows operating systems that are no longer supported or are about to lose full technical support."

Traditionally, the PC industry has relied upon upgrades every three or four years from businesses, which buy two-thirds of all PCs sold annually. That cycle is now on its way out, because of market saturation and, ironically, the fact that businesses are happy with what they have, according to analysts.

Aside from obsolete technical support, there are few reasons to replace old PCs, Gartner said. Shiffler argues a new upgrade cycle won't begin until 2008, when Longhorn - the codename for Windows XP's successor - becomes mainstream. In the meantime, Microsoft's only announced product is XP Service Pack 2, which will largely consist of improvements in security and patch management, along with a possible "refresh" of XP known as XP Reloaded. "The next really exciting wave of architecture is Longhorn," says RedMonk LLC analyst James Governor.

But as far as businesses are concerned, Longhorn is less a product than a term used to describe Microsoft's technology plans. "For enterprises it's too early to plan around Longhorn. It will not be a reality for deployment for some time - and nobody adopts the first release of an operating system anyway," he says.

New security capabilities - now Microsoft's biggest priority - could drive upgrades, but here the problem could be convincing buyers that new systems such as Longhorn really will improve safety. "There is no assurance that the new environment will be any more secure than the existing ones, despite how it's advertised," says IDC analyst Roger Kay. "Security is a weakest-link problem, and no matter how intimidating the facade of the Maginot line, the Panzers can still sweep around them."

At its recent WinHEC hardware conference Microsoft convinced some that 64-bit computing will soon be a reality on the desktop, which could change the upgrade game, industry observers said. However, the real problem is that businesses don't want to be tied to a regular upgrade cycle, according to analysts, and that means the PC industry will have to find new ways to maintain its growth.

Microsoft, for example, is shifting away from the traditional model with schemes such as the controversial Software Assurance plan, which champions

a subscription-style model. "Microsoft is moving from the old upgrade cycle to promoting all their products as a coherent whole," says IDC group consultant Chris Ingle. "They are pushing more server products and subscription products."

IBM is attempting to change the game with an emphasis on middleware, which would allow users to access the same data whether on a PC or on a mobile device - a move which incidentally could erode Microsoft's traditional desktop software stronghold. Red Hat is also pushing a different view of the desktop with its new desktop Linux software, available only as an enterprise service.

"The PC is now a mature market, and companies are going to go looking elsewhere," says Shiffler. Gartner says in the longer term the industry will see steady growth in the high single-digits, down substantially from the double-digit growth upon which the industry was built.

Gartner sees the PC business continuing to look much as it has done, but on a longer upgrade cycle - perhaps four years rather than three - and minus the boost given by new market penetration. As a result, companies are having to make radical shifts in their business models. Shiffler says, "Companies are still adjusting to what's going on."

Linux vendors such as Red Hat have said they hope to capitalize on the opportunity presented by the current replacement boom. "Now, with a major hardware refresh cycle underway, this is a great opportunity," says Red Hat president and CEO Matthew Szulik in a recent Techworld interview.

But getting Microsoft customers to switch to Linux desktops will be like squeezing blood from a stone, Shiffler says. "Linux may be right for select markets, but not generally," he said. Barriers include competing with Microsoft's huge library of applications.

Customers may make a great show of studying Linux's cost benefits over Windows, but this is mostly in order to get a better deal from Microsoft, Shiffler argues. "People are definitely disgruntled over the prices Microsoft is charging, but I'm not sure Linux is the answer to that," he says.

'Waffles' Brings Up Kerry Site in Prank

With the presidential election approaching, computer geeks on a mission are having fun playing spoofs on search engine Google.

Since Thursday, the top result on Google from typing in "waffles" has been Democratic candidate John Kerry's official campaign site.

The phrase appears nowhere on Kerry's site. But conservative bloggers skewed the search engine results by posting the phrase on their own Web pages and linking it to the Kerry site, in a technique called Google-bombing. (Google's search results are partly based on how many times the searched-for word appears on sites around the Web.)

It was started by a 23-year-old first-year Pennsylvania law student Ken Jacobson, who scattered the word "waffles" throughout his blog, Esoteric Diatribe, back in April - all linking to Kerry's site. He contacted a few other conservative bloggers and within 10 days, more than 50 other bloggers

had done the same on their home pages.

His conservative leanings were one motivation. But Jacobson said he also wanted to call attention to how vulnerable Google is to special interest groups wanting to control public opinion. "I see Google being exploitable in a bad way," he said. "It’s dangerous, even from a national security point of view."

Other bloggers didn’t waste time getting even. Liberal bloggers apparently succeeded in making the Bush-Cheney campaign site come up as the third result when "waffles" was entered on Yahoo’s search site. Their efforts weren’t enough though: The conservatives created enough links to Kerry’s site that they kept him in first place even on Yahoo.

Even the Kerry campaign weighed in. It purchased Google AdWords, text ads that come up beside Google search results when certain words are typed in. The links referred to Kerry’s Web site, and reportedly suggested that users "read about President Bush’s Waffles."

Google had no comment on the pranks. Experts say there is little the search engine can do to combat such a concerted effort by many people to skew results.

It’s just the latest in a string of spoofs played by tricksters on a political mission. After France refused to join the coalition forces fighting Iraq, a Google search for "French military victories" brought up a spoof page that said no documents were found and asked, "Did you mean ’French military defeats?’ "

British Boy Cons Internet Friend In Suicide Bid

A British teenager posed as an espionage agent in an Internet chatroom to persuade a friend to stab him to death in a complex and bizarre suicide attempt, a court was told.

"Skilled writers of fiction would struggle to conjure up a plot such as that which arises here," said the judge hearing the case at Manchester Crown Court, northwest England.

The would-be victim, aged 14 - named only as Boy B - invented a complex cast of fictional characters with which he communicated with his 16-year-old friend, Boy A, eventually exerting a huge degree of control over him.

The older teenager was eventually persuaded that he had been recruited by the British Secret Service to kill Boy B, after which he would be rewarded with a job as well as a sexual relationship with the 39-year-old female "spy".

In June last year, Boy A carried out his "orders" and stabbed his friend - who, he had also been told, was suffering from a cancerous tumour - in the chest and stomach, the court was told.

However Boy B did not die, and police later pieced together the astonishing story from 56,000 lines of computer chatroom text between Boy A and his various real and invented correspondents.

Boy A was given a two-year supervision order on Friday after pleading guilty to attempted murder, while Boy B was given a three-year order for perverting the course of justice and incitement to murder, and banned from using Internet chatrooms.

"It was incitement to commit murder - his own murder," Detective Chief Inspector Julian Ross, who led the investigation team, said of Boy B's complicated plot. "I am not aware of any other cases where that has taken place."

Judge David Maddison said "a number of extraordinary features (are) associated with this case".

Under normal circumstances a charge of attempted murder would carry a long jail term, he told Boy A, while adding: "But these could not be described as any normal circumstances."

"I accept, fantastic though it seems when looked at now in the cold light of day, that ... so convincingly were the characters presented to you that you really did believe you had been recruited by the Secret Service to kill your co-accused and face the consequences if you did not do so."

The court had been told how Boy B first contacted Boy A in a chatroom in early 2003 by posing as a teenage girl, who then "introduced" Boy B as her step-brother. The boys became friends and later met in the flesh.

However the plot thickened as Boy B introduced a series of other characters apart from the "spy", including someone who - to Boy A's increasing horror - supposedly stalked Boy B and then killed the girl.

Detective Chief Inspector Ross said nothing in Boy B's background suggested why he wanted to die.

"We have not come across any underlying things that would turn a child to do this sort of thing," he said.

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